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The Gang's Not All Here

The State of Latinos in Contemporary US Media

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This chapter highlights findings from "The Latino Media Gap," a comprehensive report released in collaboration with the National Association of Latino Independent Producers and the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race at Columbia University.[1] Using a wide range of methodologies, including statistical analysis, historical research, case studies, and interviews, this chapter provides a state-of-the-art picture of the status of US Latinos in movies, television, radio, and the Internet. It also explores obstacles to and strategies for a more diverse media landscape.

The first three sections focus on the relative stagnation of Latino participation in media over the last decades as well as the significant lack of Latino decision makers in studios and networks. The final three emphasize the limits and potential of policies, advocacy campaigns, and storytelling innovations, and how these are transforming the industries and expanding opportunity for Latinos in media.

The Incredibly Shrinking Latino Presence, 1940–2013

According to the 2010 US census, Latinos constitute 16.7 percent of the population of the United States. In all of the most densely populated cities

such as New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, Latinos constitute an even greater share: from 27.4 percent to 68.2 percent of residents.[2] In addition, Latinos have $1.2 trillion spending power—more than any other minoritized group, including Asian Americans, African Americans, and women. They also currently constitute 20 percent of eighteen- to thirty-year-olds, the advertising industry's most coveted demographic. The rate of Latino population growth is no less noteworthy: over the last thirty years, Latinos have grown seven times faster than the rest of the population.[3]

Yet these numbers do not align with mass media participation. Although Latinos have been part of the mainstream media industries from their inception and a range of Spanish-speaking networks currently aim to serve this audience, the level of inclusion in mainstream English-speaking media remains stunningly low. This is the case across all traditional media—film, television, radio—and genres, including entertainment and news.

If one considers standard reference measures such as the participation of Latinos in the professional media guilds—Directors Guild of America (DGA), Writers Guild of America (WGA), or the Screen Actors Guild (SAG)— Latino participation in 2010–2013 ranges from 2 percent in DGA and 3 percent in WGA to 6 percent in SAG. Available figures for on-camera representation in movies and television at the most visible levels are even lower in some categories. In the ten top-rated shows of 2010–2013, Latinos made up 0 percent of the total leads, 2.8 percent of directors, and 1.7 percent of producers. In the top ten movies, Latinos accounted for 1.9 percent of leads, 2 percent of directors, and 6 percent of writers. Significantly, the movie sample included only one US-born and -raised Latino.[4]

While the news media claim to represent the "real America," reality is often worse than fiction. In newsrooms, all minorities are under 13 percent of the workforce, and their numbers have declined steadily in recent years.[5] Our survey of nineteen prime-time shows revealed that of twenty-two anchors featured in news shows through 2013, twenty (90.9 percent) were white and two (9 percent) were black. No anchor was Latino. Equally dramatic, all available studies suggest that over the last decade, less than 1 percent of all news featured Latinos.[6] Latinos are also generally excluded from talk shows, accounting for less than 3 percent of all guests.[7]

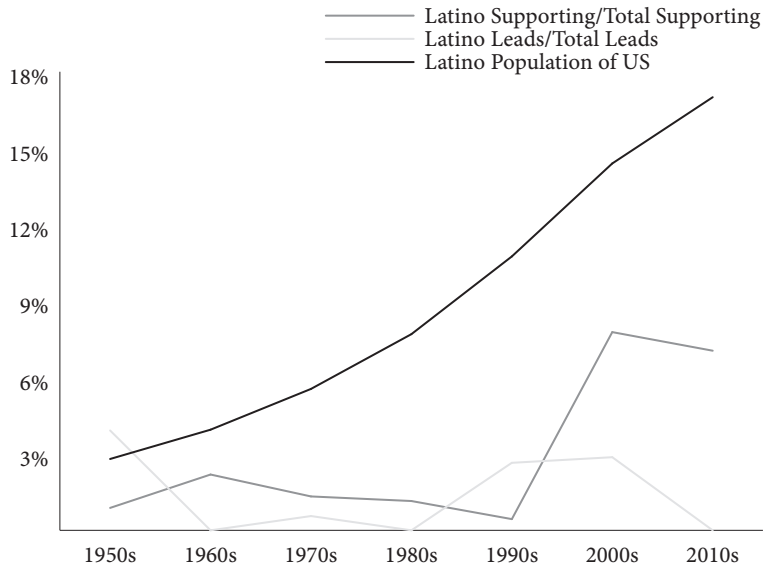

Figure 5.1. Latino Actors in Ten Highest-Rated Scripted TV Shows of Each Season, Averaged by Decade

Importantly, the assumption that Latino participation will simply follow growing demographics is not borne out by our research. A comparison between Latino inclusion today and in earlier periods shows that Latinos actually enjoyed higher per capita rates of participation in three prior moments: during the 1940s (film), 1950s (television), and 1970s (television). Whereas in the 1950s, on average, Latinos were 3.9 percent of the leading TV actors and 2.8 percent of the population, in 2010–2012 they were over 16.7 percent of the population and 0 percent of leading actors (see figure 5.1). Even when we expand the scope, the pattern holds: In the top twenty-five scripted TV shows, there is not a single year since 1950 in which more than two shows with Latino leads aired.[8]

Likewise, although among the top ten films with the highest domestic gross, the percentage of lead roles filled by Latinos is slightly increasing, proportionally it has not caught up with the 1940s. During that period, when the percentage of Latinos in the United States was 2 percent, the percentage of Latino leading actors in the ten top-grossing films was also 2 percent. By the early twenty-first century, when the

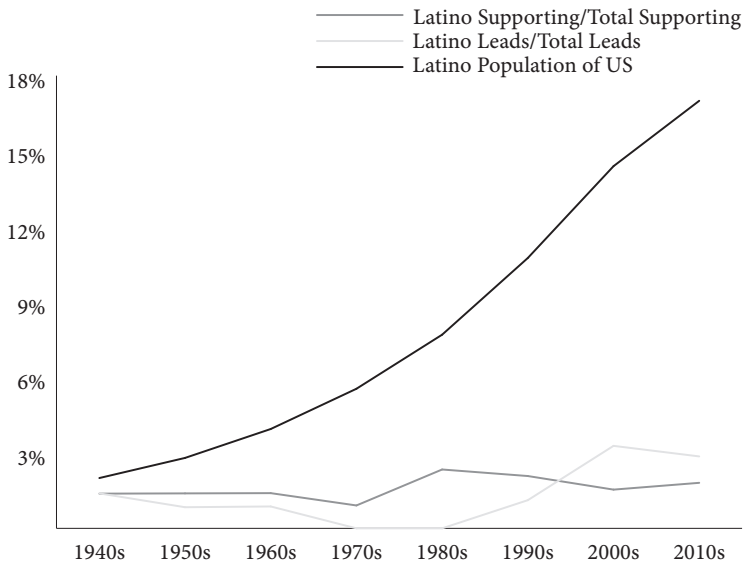

Figure 5.2. Latino Actors in Ten Highest-Grossing Yearly Films, Averaged by Decade

Latino population had skyrocketed to nearly 17 percent of the US population, the average percentage of Latino lead actors declined to less than 2 percent (see figure 5.2).

In other words, whereas in earlier decades there were relatively few Latinos in the media industry, per capita, there was at times a more proportional level of participation. For Latinos to enjoy population-appropriate representation in the current decade, the film and television industries would have to hire Latinos for 23.5 percent of leading roles for all media released between 2013 and 2019, and a greater share for writers and directors. Otherwise, the gap between representations and population will persist as a structural feature of US mass media.

Stereotyped, Still

Numbers, of course, do not tell the whole story. In fact, if the number of Latinos in front of the camera suddenly increased, the media landscape would, in some ways, worsen. This is not only because Latinos are underrepresented in media, but also because in the relatively rare

instances when Latinos appear, they tend to embody the same stereotypes first visualized in cinema in the 1900s: criminals, domestic servants, sexual objects, and comic relief.

The persistence of stereotypes has been noted by all major studies of the past decade: A comprehensive 2002 study, for instance, observed that the "vast majority of Latino male characters appeared in prime time television as police employees or criminals" and that "the vast majority of Latina characters appeared in prime time television as nurses, clerical workers, or domestic workers."[9] More recently, a 2012 brief by Latino Decisions similarly concluded that "non-Latinos report seeing Latinos in stereotypically negative or subordinate roles (gardeners, maids, dropouts, and criminals) most often in television and film."[10]

Focusing on the last few years, we found that not only do stereotypical storylines and characters continue to dominate both fictional and nonfictional shows and movies, but Latinos remain confined to a few genres, mostly television crime dramas and action movies. Among the top ten shows from 2010 to 2013, for instance, only one of the main adult characters played by a Latino/a actor was not a member of law enforcement. This was Sofia Vergara, who plays the sexy spitfire role of Gloria Delgado-Pritchett in *Modern Family*.

Similarly, in the ten highest-grossing movies from 2010 to 2012, Latinos primarily played law enforcement, criminal, and/or working-class roles. In fact, Latinos were more than three times as likely to play blue-collar workers, such as construction workers and waitresses, than were actors as a whole. They were also more likely to play blue-collar criminals, involving theft of goods and cash, kidnapping, the manufacture and sale of illegal drugs, and physical violence over white-collar/corporate criminals, involved in embezzlement, bribery, cybercrime, and/or identity theft. Not surprisingly, of the Latino criminals who appeared in the highest-grossing films from 2010 to 2012, all were gang-affiliated. Taken together, criminal and law enforcement roles made up 38.64 percent of all roles played by Latinos.

Latinas remain similarly restricted to stereotypical parts. A good case in point is the role of the maid. Once dominated by African American actresses playing "Mammy" characters, the role has shifted decisively toward Latina actresses in the last thirty years. Beginning in 1996,

Latina actresses played eleven of sixteen featured maid characters in film and television. In 2013, this trend was the subject of much controversy when the actress and political activist Eva Longoria became executive producer of *Devious Maids*, an ABC show featuring five Latina actresses as maids working for affluent households.

Although most studies emphasize fiction film and television, nonfiction characterizations are equally, if not more, stereotypical. In news, 66 percent of stories focusing on Latinos are about crime, terrorism, or illegal immigration. In some ways, the news category is more alarming, as the majority of people still primarily rely on television news for basic information[11] In the end, the quantity and quality of Latino representation—as well as the debate around it—remain relatively unchanged.

The Deciders: Who Is Running the Show?

The direness of the media landscape begs the question of who is responsible, ultimately a matter of how media are produced. As it has been widely studied, major media corporations are based on a top-down model with tightly controlled decision-making structures. This means that only executives high on the corporate ladder approve the movies and television shows available to the public. In television, a producer or showrunner can also have a significant influence on all talent decisions. When considering the profiles of who has greenlight and hiring power, the underrepresentation of Latinos as writers, directors, and actors pales in comparison with their underrepresentation in such positions as company CEOs and television showrunners.

Beginning at the top of the ladder, in the leading twenty-two English-language television, film, cable news, and radio broadcast companies, all CEOs are white men except Kevin Tsujihara, the Asian American CEO of Warner Brothers Entertainment, and Paula Kerger, CEO of PBS.[12] If one considers the chairmen and CEOs of these studios' parent companies, all but Kazuo Hirai of the Japan-based Sony Corporation are white men.

When we examine the roster of company entertainment presidents, the picture is not very different. Of twenty-two top English-language television, film, cable news, and radio broadcast companies, twenty-one studio presidents are white and nineteen are men. Only one studio

president, Nina Tassler, who is head of CBS, is Latina. Moreover, there is no Latino who acts as a greenlight executive on any major English-language news show or is the head of a major, English-language radio broadcast company.

The picture on showrunners is no less alarming (see table 5.1). In the period from 2010 to 2012, Latinos accounted for less than 1 percent of producers of new pilot shows. In 2011, 4.9 percent of all actors were Latino. Yet only 2 out of 352 producers were Latinos, resulting in the stunningly low figure of 0.57 percent. In 2011 and 2012, there were no Latino writers for network TV pilots at all.

From 2010 to 2013, the number of writer and producer positions filled by Latinos actually increased. But the numbers remain small in relation to population: in 2013, only 10 out of 447 writer, producer, and director positions for network TV pilots were Latino, representing 2.24 percent. It is also unclear whether increases will be sustained. Between 2010 and 2011, for example, the proportion of Latino writers, producers, and directors fell. Additionally, in the past four years there has been only one Latina or Latino working in any of these categories for a network pilot: Sofia Vergara, who is executive producing the upcoming ABC drama *Killer Women*.

In TV news, the view is strikingly similar: our survey of nineteen prime-time shows revealed that of twenty-one executive producers, all were white, including three women. Of the eight shows that posted information on their websites about their producing staff, only 2 of 114 producers, or 1.75 percent, were Latino. Media decisions are also driven

Table 5.1. Latinos behind the Camera in Network TV Pilots, 2010–2013

	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	2013 (%)
Latino Writer/Producer/Director	1.5	0.7	1.0	2.2
Latino Writer	1.6	0.0	0.0	5.2
Latino Producer	1.8	0.57	0.93	2.07
Latino Director	1.47	1.30	3.70	2.70
Pilots with a Latino Writer, Producer, or Director	4.82	3.49	4.65	9.00

Note: I thank Jeff Valdez, co-chairman of Maya Entertainment, for pointing out this trend to me.

by those who own the airwaves. According to a study by the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council, in 2009 Latinos did not own any studios and owned only 2.5 percent of television stations and 2.9 percent of radio stations. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) released similar figures in late 2012. According to the FCC, between 2009 and 2011, the increase of Latino ownership of television stations was negligible, from 2.5 percent to 2.7 percent.[13] Latinos hold majority voting interests in just 2.9 percent of radio stations, demonstrating stagnation in this category.[14]

The lack of Latino decision makers is evident in other bodies, such as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which routinely recognizes talent in the film industry. As of 2012, 94 percent of the Academy members were white, and fewer than 2 percent were Latino.[15] This composition is arguably evident in the selections made and in the public awarding of the Oscars. From 2002 to 2012, only 4 percent of Oscar nominees in the major categories were Latino, and none of them won an award.[16] No Latino has received an Oscar for acting since Benicio del Toro won best supporting actor for the 2000 film *Traffic*. In the years since, there have been 240 nominations in acting categories, including only one nomination of a US Latino—again del Toro, in 2003.

Diversity Trouble

These low levels of participation clash not only with changing demographics but also with the corporate discourse on diversity. During the 1990s, studios and networks coped with the pressure brought on by social movements and advocacy groups by creating diversity departments and appointing people of color, mostly African Americans, as diversity executives. The term "diversity" emerged as a less confrontational term than race, gender, or sexual orientation.

While it would be an exaggeration to conclude that diversity departments have been completely ineffectual, it would not be unfair to say that they have not significantly changed the face of the industry. This is partly related to the fact that in most instances, diversity executives gather data and can exert influence but generally have little or no power to enforce compliance. This may account for the striking result that although all twenty-seven diversity and other executives interviewed in

our study favored diversity as a policy, four out of five agreed that diversity departments had largely failed to achieve their main objective.

Interviewees identified a broad range of reasons at multiple levels, including interpersonal, institutional, and social, to account for why diversity departments had not been highly effective. Here, I will highlight five that capture some of the key dynamics.

First, an overwhelming majority of diversity officers expressed that while marketing to Latinos has become a strategic imperative in the face of changing demographics, diversity itself had not become an institutional value, but rather "a Christmas ornament that you bring out and after it's over, you put it away."[17] Or as a diversity officer bluntly stated, "Diversity officers are managers of discontent and get paid well to do it."[18] Even further, some felt that diversity initiatives were in fact a conservative mechanism to maintain the status quo. In the words of one guild advocate, "Diversity is the product of white backlash. Taking some of our language and using it on us."[19]

In addition, there was a strong consensus that the "comfort zone" of decision makers played a significant role in hiring decisions.[20] All interviewees agreed that producers and executives tend to hire people whom they know, people who are recommended by acquaintances, and/or people with whom they feel comfortable. "The industry is hostile, dog eat dog and very stressful," one guild advocate commented. "In that world, you want people who have your back."[21] Due to the class and racial hierarchies that organize US society and the fact that the vast majority of top media industry management is currently white and male, hires tend to be made along the same racial and gender lines. The assumption is that people outside the network will not be loyal or supportive to those already inside.

Most interviewees also believed that Latinos, in contrast to African Americans, are perceived as recent immigrants and foreigners; hence, their inclusion is not understood as a public good. In the words of a guild advocate, "Whites do not feel responsible. Their sense is 'I didn't do it.'"[22] Consistently, executives feel no urgency about increasing opportunity. As one press relations executive observed, "At our company, people tend not to leave. So we can't keep up with outside demographics. We don't have many opportunities for promoting minorities."[23]

In a broader sense, despite extensive documentation that racial exclusion persists in the workplace and in the media, beginning in the 1990s and culminating in the immediate aftermath of President Obama's 2008 election, there is a growing sense, particularly among whites, that the United States is now a postracial society. According to one guild advocate, "There is no discrimination. People just look for where the money is."[24] The fact that racial discrimination does not look or feel as it did in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century produces a context for "racial fatigue," or the exhaustion of racial discourse as a compelling means to address persistent exclusion. There is also a general rejection of the argument that collective rights take precedence over individual talent and preparation. As one studio executive put it, "The days of affirmative action are over."[25]

Moreover, for major studios and networks, diversity is understood globally. This means that employment and programs involving Latin America and Latin Americans are understood as contributing to Latino diversity. An example of this is that when pressed for evidence of Latino participation, most diversity and human resources officials cited their overseas divisions and Latin American–born and –bred talent. "We have produced shows with Argentina, Venezuela," a cable executive pointed out.[26] On the ground, this conflation also means that when opportunities open, it is often Latin Americans rather than US Latinos who benefit, as the former tend to come from middle-class backgrounds, are light-skinned, and/or are better educated than many Latinos and are therefore perceived as more competent.

Lastly, the description of the media industry as a family business or a business based on relationships tends to conceal a greater anxiety experienced by people already working in the industry: fear of displacement and change. As one guild advocate observed, "They say that the business is based on relationships. But the fact is that people just don't want to change. We do a lot of network mixers and it goes nowhere. The business is so competitive, no one wants to open it up to new people for fear of displacement."[27] Or in more direct terms, there is the sense that, as a diversity executive put it, "When someone is up, someone is down."[28]

Significantly, the fear factor is not only a white and Latino issue. Some interviewees pointed out that African Americans were also reluctant to work on behalf of Latinos. In the words of one producer, "There

is a fear of black displacement because blacks had been standing in for all diversity until now."[29] The fact that inclusion is largely understood in racial terms reinforces racial solidarity and perpetuates fear of others.

Despite the enormous reluctance by decision makers to diversify talent, however, our research shows that greater diversity produces tangible economic benefits for media entities. The classic case may well be ABC. In 2004, ABC was at the very bottom of the pile in ratings. In response, the CEO, Steve McPherson, designed a strategy based on the idea that given US demographics, diverse shows could help revive network ratings and increase revenue. To this end, McPherson greenlighted three shows with key Latino talent in quick succession: *Desperate Housewives* (2004), *Lost* (2004), and *Ugly Betty* (2006). The results were remarkable: By 2005, ABC's ratings had climbed from 3.2 in the 2003–2004 season to 4 in the 2005–2006 one. The network's advertising revenue also jumped to an unprecedented $50 million in the *Ugly Betty*/*Grey's Anatomy* Thursday slot.[30]

Equally important, the ABC experience is not unique. Similar outcomes have ensued in a broad range of contexts, from hit shows like *American Idol*, which stopped its rating drop when it hired Jennifer Lopez as a jury member in 2011, to KPCC, a public radio station in Southern California. In 2012, the station decided to hire a Latino cohost, A Martinez, for its morning news program, *The Madeleine Brand Show*. Even after the show's star host, Madeleine Brand, quit in protest,[31] the station's ratings and revenue increased substantially: the percentage of Latino adults listening to the station more than doubled, while the show's AQH (a measure of listenership) increased by 15 percent and the audience share by 20 percent. Donations to the station hit record highs.[32]

Uploading Stories: Latino Producers Online

The fact that most decision makers resist diversification even when it makes business sense suggests that they may be acting against their own economic interests to preserve other forms of power. This partly accounts for an important new development: the increasing Latino flight from some traditional English-language media, particularly television, to new media. While the vast majority of research and advocacy efforts continue to be aimed at incorporating Latinos into television and

studio filmmaking, this focus overlooks various important converging trends of Latino creativity in the Internet and the industry at large.

First, not only are studios increasingly searching for talent online, but Internet and media companies may be the future of high-quality content production—or at least a growing part. An indication of this shift is the recent decision by DreamWorks Animation to stream three hundred hours of episodic television content via Netflix, bypassing the obvious choice of cable television.[33]

Second, Latino media engagement is increasingly taking place online and in multiple platforms. A wide range of studies suggests that the rate of Latino participation online exceeds or over-indexes in relation to other groups. For instance, a 2011 Nielsen study showed that, on average, Latinos have considerably higher rates of Internet consumption and watch 15 percent less television than other groups.[34] Moreover, Latinos spend 68 percent more time watching Internet videos than non-Hispanic whites, and 20 percent more time watching these videos on their phones.[35] Latinos also engage more frequently with social media than non-Hispanic whites: 54.2 percent of Latinos were found to be regular Facebook users, compared to 43 percent of whites.

Third, and even more important in this context, much of Latino media creativity is taking place online. A recent study of college students found that Latinos are more likely than white students to be online content creators.[36] Furthermore, the Latino online presence is substantial not just when it comes to downloading, but uploading as well. According to the Forrester Social Technographic Ladder, 47 percent of online Latinos are "content creators." This represents an over-index of 263 when the activity of non-Hispanics is indexed at 100.[37]

Consistently, our study also found that in some genres, Latinos are far more visible on YouTube than they are on network television. Of the two hundred YouTube channels with the most subscribers, thirty-four feature content created by Latinos in the United States and Latin America (17.5 percent). Among the top two hundred channels, there are twenty-five VEVO channels dedicated to specific musical artists; five of these are Latino artists (16 percent).[38] In the popular genre of young women's fashion advice, two of the top three independent YouTube creators are Latinas.[39] Comparable trends are evident in music-related videos as well: The highest-rated YouTube channel featuring a

rock band is Boyce Avenue, made up of three Puerto Rican brothers. Latinos, including Boyce Avenue and Megan Nicole, make up two of the top three serious, independent musicians on YouTube.[40]

These consumption and production trends will only amplify over time, due to larger demographic factors. Users of social media tend to be young people, and Latinos represent one of the youngest ethnic groups in the United States: over 60 percent of Latinos are younger than thirty-five, and 75 percent are younger than forty-five. Yet the importance of Latinos in media is not only about consumer online production or consumption, as important as these practices are. Even when Latinos have limited access to educational training and/or to the mainstream media industries, they are producing major media innovations. A case in point is the Latino transmedia pioneer Jeff Gomez.

Born in the Lower East Side in 1963 to a US Jewish mother and a Puerto Rican father, Gomez has become a pivotal figure in the consolidation and recognition of transmedia, an interactive form of storytelling in which people collectively create new worlds in various media, including books, comic books, ads, computer games, films, television, computers, and phones. His contributions to the field include a paradigm shift regarding the nature of studio film storytelling, as evidenced by the transmedia universes that he created for Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Prince of Persia*, and *Tron*, Microsoft's *Halo*, and James Cameron's *Avatar*. To a large extent due to his work's impact, in 2010 the Producers Guild of America (PGA) ratified a credit called "Transmedia Producer" to recognize those who create worlds across multiple media platforms.

Whereas most of Gomez's work since the 2000 founding of his company, Starlight Runner Entertainment, has focused on creating "blockbuster universes," he is increasingly focused on original storytelling and introducing transmedia education in schools:

> What disappoints me from my peers is that they say that transmedia is hypercomplicated, that it requires a mathematical mind. That's not the case. Transmedia is like a *novela*, you expand the characters. The true path that I am on is to show people, young people, that there are alternative ways of thinking, so that you are not locked into a way of being that is self destructive.

Ultimately, Gomez views transmedia as a symptom of a much larger social shift in which consumer power extends beyond just purchasing commodities: "Large companies are underestimating the potency from which the consumer owns the dialogue. The paradigm shift is among the most dramatic ever seen."[41]

Power to the Mouse: Unleashing Latino Consumer Power in the New Century

As Gomez suggests, the current juncture is a historically new one. In this last section, we will shift the accent from consumer to power in considering the ubiquitous phrase "Latino consumer power." When invoked by the media and even media advocates, the term tends to refer to the amount of money Latinos spend in purchasing consumer goods: over $1.2 trillion, or close to 10 percent of the US total. It also comes from future projections: According to the market analysis company IBISWorld, by 2015, Latino buying power will hit $1.6 trillion, "growing at a 48 percent clip, compared to about 27 percent for the entire nation."[42] To put this figure in perspective: If Latinos constituted a nation, their economy would rank among the largest in the world.

In the media world these numbers are particularly relevant, as Latinos are among the most avid of consumers. As previously noted, in the key advertising demographic of eighteen to thirty-four years, Latinos have the highest rates of media consumption of any racial or ethnic group in the United States.[43] Overall, Latinos purchased 26 percent of movie tickets in the United States in 2012. While the average moviegoer went to the movies 4.1 times in 2010, Latino moviegoers went 6.4 times.[44] Latinos were also the only ethnic group to purchase more tickets in 2012 than in 2011.[45] The high rate of Latino attendance is one of the main reasons why the US and Canada box office hit a record total of $18.8 billion in 2012.[46]

The allusions to Latino consumer power, however, tend to be accompanied by the assumption of passivity. Even when studies show that Latinos actually switch brands at higher rates than non-Hispanics, the news media tend to portray Latino consumers as brand-loyal.[47] Furthermore, some corporate executive interviewees represented activist

consumers as detrimental to achieving media change. In the words of one executive, "Protests are outdated. They ruffle feathers."[48]

Yet the mobilization of Latino media advocates and consumers has been key in the acceleration of change. Since the introduction of cinema in the late nineteenth century, Latinos have been aware of the power of media to shape perceptions and have organized accordingly. Starting in 1918 there have been at least twenty-five protests of national impact led by Latinos against media products and/or companies.

The rate of these protests increased substantially in the late 1960s and through the 1970s as Latino civil rights movements identified media access as a civil right; the rate declined during the 1980s. Triggered in part by demographic changes, protest picked up once more in the mid-1990s, and the last three years have seen an increase in activity reminiscent of the late 1960s (see figures 5.3 and 5.4). Significantly, in addition to their frequency, recent Latino media advocacy campaigns are becoming increasingly effective in comparison with prior decades. Of seven protests since 1998, all but one (86 percent) achieved all or part of their objectives in considerably less time than in earlier decades.

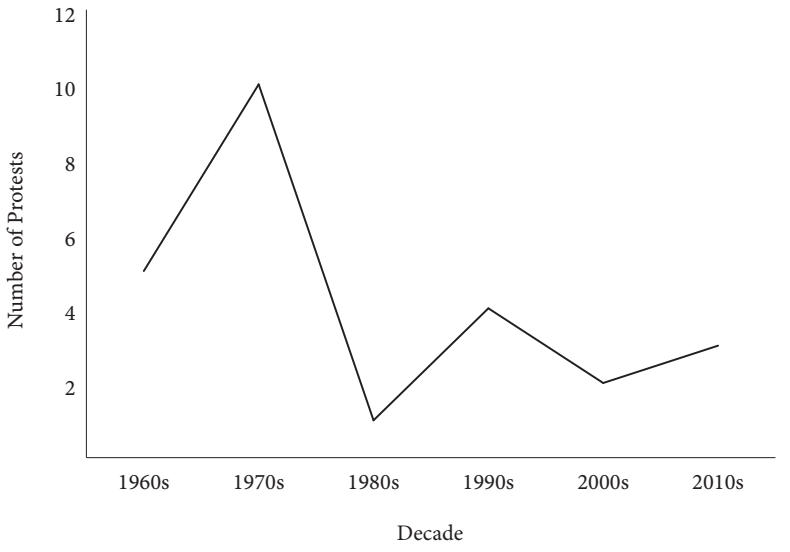

Figure 5.3. Number of Media-Rated Campaigns Led by Latinos

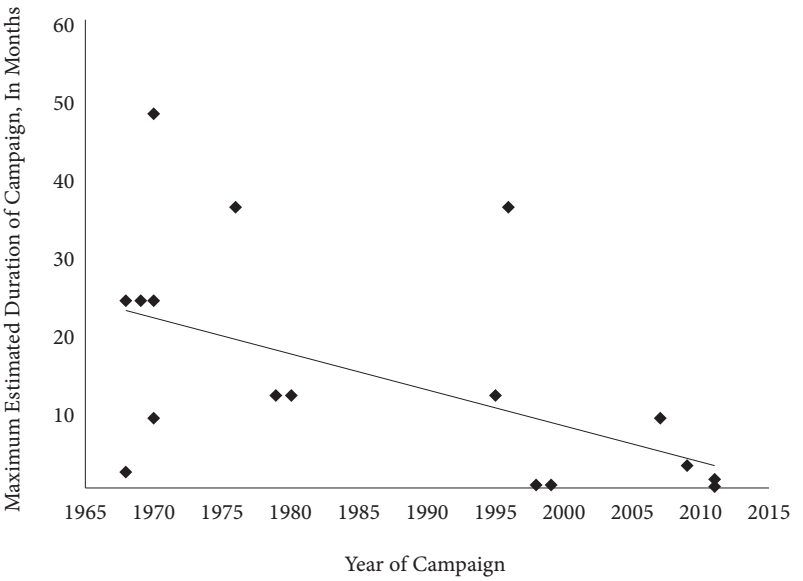

Figure 5.4. Length of Media-Rated Campaigns Led by Latinos

Furthermore, whereas activists did not generally utilize consumer discourse as a way to argue for greater Latino access to media until the 1990s (protests before were more often based on claims of racial discrimination), Latino campaigns since the 1960s have been the most effective when targeting advertising in radio and television. In fact, all Latino protests against products using stereotypical advertisements after 1968 have achieved the advocates' goals. These include mobilizations against Bell Telephone, Granny Goose, Liggett and Myers, Frito-Lay, American Motors, and Coors Light.

Not surprisingly, given the media's reliance on advertising for revenue, boycotts or campaigns aimed at television and radio programs have also often met with considerable success. They have been responsible for banning a *Seinfeld* episode that featured the burning of a Puerto Rican flag (1998) and accelerating the canceling of television shows like *Work It* in 2012. Only one ongoing campaign, started in 2012 by the National Hispanic Media Coalition against the *John and Ken* radio show, has yet been unable to take the program off the air, although it has triggered an exodus of advertisers.

Overall, the least successful campaigns have been against movie studios, which have been historically less dependent on advertisement dollars. Beginning in the late 1990s, however, some campaigns like "No nos quieren," launched again by the National Hispanic Media Coalition against ABC and Disney, became the seed of successful writing programs that provide access for Latinos to entry-level creative opportunities. Still, the vulnerability of studios is likely to increase with the rise of transmedia, as film revenue will also stem from merchandise and other products that rely heavily on advertisement.

A compelling example that showcases new forms of media advocacy in the Internet age is the 2009 campaign demanding an end to the CNN TV news show *Lou Dobbs Tonight*. As is well known, since its establishment in 2003, the show had become a site for anti-immigrant and racist rhetoric, often presenting exaggeration as fact. In 2005, for instance, Dobbs made the claim that immigrants were importing leprosy across the Mexican border at a very high rate, a total of seven thousand cases in three years, when in fact this was the total number in the past thirty years.[49] Regardless, CNN did not act to hold Dobbs accountable to journalistic standards. Instead, CNN supported the show, which experienced a significant ratings bounce of 72 percent between 2003 and 2007.[50]

Dubbed "Basta Dobbs," the campaign was led by the media strategist Roberto Lovato and called on CNN to fire Lou Dobbs. Organized through the website Presente.org, the effort was composed of over forty grassroots organizations spanning twelve states and twenty-five major media markets. In pressing its case, the campaign made two main arguments: first, that CNN could not retain Dobbs and hope to be considered a politically neutral news site in relation to MSNBC and Fox; and second, that CNN could not simultaneously hope to court Latino viewers with its *Latino in America* series to be aired in November and retain Dobbs as a host.

In addition to mobilizing traditional media by recruiting writers to contribute op-eds in the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *El Diario*, and *La Opinión* and gathering 125,000 signatures, the campaign made use of new media to amplify its claims. Even further, the effort included the creation of a text-message shortcode publicized via radio and on-the-ground events in eighteen of the largest Latino media markets,

which enabled ten thousand people to join the campaign via cell phone by texting the word "enough" to number 30644. Moreover, "Basta Dobbs" organized a digital sit-in on CNN's website, which allowed thousands of Presente.org members and supporters to deliver their comments and pictures directly to CNN.

The "Basta Dobbs" campaign's innovation, however, was not only about technology. It was fundamentally about *how* to conceptualize a campaign for the global digital age. The campaign, for instance, used the media to critique the media: it was launched at the same time that Dobbs chose to participate in an anti-immigrant conference organized by the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) in September, and relaunched a month later when CNN's *Latinos in America* was to be broadcast. As Lovato sums it up, "On their big day in the limelight with *Latinos in America*, all coverage was about how Latinos wanted CNN to cut its ties to Lou Dobbs."[51] The negative attention both hurt the brand and jeopardized the resources and hopes invested in *Latinos in America* to bring Latinos back to the network.

Fully grasping both the fact that CNN is a global brand and that Latinos are a transnational group, Presente.org subtitled some of its media materials so that Spanish-speaking Latinos could learn what was being broadcast about them, and threatened to take the campaign throughout Latin America and beyond if CNN did not budge. In this way, Presente.org turned a potential disadvantage—the amorphousness of studio and television diversity standards that favor Latin Americans over US Latinos—into an advantage. They approached CNN's "diversity" challenge not as a national civil rights issue but as one with the potential to mobilize news consumers transnationally.

After nearly six months of the campaign, on November 11, 2009, Lou Dobbs announced he was leaving the network. CNN's president, Jonathan Klein, denied that the protests played a role in this outcome. Activist pressure was likely not the only variable in terminating the show. By July, Dobbs's strategy of building an audience by mobilizing anti-immigrant feelings and fueling the President Obama "birther" controversy was no longer working: he had lost 15 percent of his overall viewership.[52] One month before his exit, the show was "dead last" in the critical age demographic of twenty-five to fifty-four.[53] But the show's decline and ouster were greatly accelerated by media and immigrant

activist pressure. At the end, CNN actually paid Dobbs an $8 million severance package so he would leave before his contract expired.[54]

Conclusion: Changing Media in the Digital Age

As "Basta Dobbs" suggests, an effective campaign requires the circulation of new stories that link broad networks and leverage their strength via online technology and on-the-ground connections. In contrast to the film and television eras, the success of media today increasingly depends on a network of consumers who deliberate and communicate on quality content at a fast rate. Or, as the writer Michael Walsh put it, "early visibility is a crucial factor that determines ultimate popularity in a networked environment."[55]

This new environment also affects political action. In the words of Lovato, "The compression of time that is characteristic of digital reality and acceleration of communication systems also accelerates political time."[56] The power of a Latino consumer boycott of a studio or network is on the rise. On the one hand, while protest has been the realm of media activists in the past, today more people can participate. On the other hand, due to the demographic shift, a consumer protest involving only a small percentage of the population over a month or less can seriously cut into a media company's profit margin and stain a brand's prestige.

At the same time, the current juncture is not without major challenges. The slight rise in employment for acting positions over decision-making ones indicates that change will more likely take place in front of the camera than behind, not altering fundamental power dynamics. In addition, the accelerated shift to Internet media production will likely continue to depress wages in creative employment and can result in double exploitation: as producer and consumer. Yet, if Latino consumer power is organized and mobilized at a higher rate than at present, it could become a major force in reshaping the media landscape. A "consumer population" with $1.2 trillion in buying power should be capable of that—and more.

NOTES

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